THE ARLINGTON STORY

1957
Arlington Public Schools
Arlington, Virginia

ARLINGTON COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

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There are 8 cooperative schools (operated by the parents on a non-profit basis) and 19 private schools (operated for profit), most of them nursery schools and kindergartens. Eight of the private schools, however, offer some elementary school training also. In most cases first grade work only is given, but one school carries the children through the second grade and one through the sixth. The private and cooperative schools enroll approximately 1,500 children.

Thus, the total number of children who can be accommodated in these 44 schools is approximately 6,500.

In addition to these three kinds of schools--church, private and cooperative--which teach some of the same grades as the public schools, as well as nursery and kindergarten classes which the public schools do not have, there are 20 schools licensed to teach some specialized subject such as dancing or music. Many of the children enrolled in these schools are, of course, regularly enrolled also in some other school. Between 1,500 and 2,000 children are registered at one of the specialized schools. 1/

2. Public schools. The 46 public schools in Arlington enrolled about 21,500 students in 1955-56.

The public schools are administered by a Division Superintendent of Schools who is appointed by the School Board for a four-year term. The School Board is composed of five members who are appointed for

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1/ Arlington County, Virginia, Child Care Counselor, Annual Report for 1955-56.

staggered terms of four years each by the County Board, the elected legislative body. Each year the Superintendent of Schools and his administrative staff prepare a budget to cover the expenses of running the schools for the following year. The proposed budget must be approved by the School Board and then by the County Board, which has the final decision over the total amount.

For the school year 1955-56, it cost more than eleven million dollars, including debt service and bond proceeds, to build and run the schools. This was about 45 per cent of the County's total expenditures. The largest part of this budget is needed for salaries of teachers and other school personnel, and to meet the payments on the bonds that were sold to build the schools. This money is obtained from local, State, and Federal sources, with the County financing more than three-fourths of the total. The local money to operate the schools is obtained only from the taxes on real estate, public service corporations, and personal property. In addition, money to build new schools is generally raised by the sale of special school bonds, after the citizens vote for such bonds. The grant from the Federal Government is given chiefly under Public Law 874 for "local educational agencies in areas affected by federal activities." The State's contribution to the local school system is about twice the amount contributed by the Federal Government. It comes mainly from the General Appropriation Fund, and is based on the average daily attendance at a specified rate for each child. The other State funds come from special appropriations for such items as transportation, supervision, school lunch, and textbooks.

Arlington County provides 6 years of schooling at the elementary level, 3 years of junior high, and 3 years of senior high. Children enter the first grade at the age of six. There are no public kindergartens.

The Arlington public schools have a diversified academic program leading to college, and vocational courses for those who wish to prepare for a job immediately after high school. There are special classes for physically handicapped, including the hard of hearing and poorly sighted children; there are classes for the mentally retarded; special remedial classes in reading, arithmetic, and speech; there are teachers for home-bound children.

The Constitution of Virginia provides that "an efficient system of public free schools shall be established and maintained in all the counties ...of the State." But good schools don't just happen. They are the result of planning and action. Statistics must be gathered to forecast the number of children who will be in school; buildings must be planned, constructed, and maintained; taxes must be levied on the citizens; teachers, librarians, bus drivers and others who will have direct contact with children during the school day must be hired and assigned; curriculum must be planned, and textbooks provided.

Good schools were, in fact, very slow in coming to Arlington. There were some schools in the town of Alexandria as early as the eighteenth century. These were tuition schools; that is, the expenses of the school were paid from payments made for each child individually. The earliest schools in the County, during the early part of the

nineteenth century, were also of the tuition type: one under Oliver Cox in the Mount Olivet Church about 1834; one under Bennie Bell about the same time; and another under Samuel Stalcup in a log cabin on a farm near the Fairfax line during the Civil War. There is no record of a public school in the County, free to everyone, until 1870 when the new Virginia Constitution went into effect. Then three schools were opened: Columbia School on Columbia Pike at Fillmore Street; Walker School at Wilson Boulevard and Glebe Road; and Arlington School for Negroes at Freedmen's Village on the Arlington Estate. The Carne School, at Glebe Road and 25th Street, North, named for the first superintendent of schools in the County, was built about the same time. The same Mr. Stalcup who headed the earlier school was the teacher at Carne. With 70 to 90 pupils in his schoolroom, he made a reputation as a good teacher and a strict disciplinarian. Discipline was enforced when necessary by corporal punishment.

In 1912, however, 42 years after the first free public school in the area that was soon to be called Arlington County, there were only 12 schools, none of which went beyond the eighth grade. Children were sent to private schools or to the Washington public schools if they wanted to go on to high school. The first public high school work began with 30 children and two teachers in a school called the Mount Vernon school in 1917. Compulsory education to age 16 was not enacted into tate law until 1918.

1920, the year Arlington County got its name, was a year of reappraisal in the County public school system--of buildings, equipment, and

curriculum. As a result, bonds were issued for an extensive building program, and the schools and curriculum were reorganized on the basis of 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of junior high, and 3 years of senior high. In 1925, Washington-Lee, along with a number of new elementary schools, was opened as a junior-senior high school. It was the first regular County high school and the first junior high school in the State of Virginia.

The spectacular growth of Arlington in the thirties and forties put a strain on the local government to supply schools. New children were arriving in the County faster than they could be housed in schools. Classrooms were overcrowded and many classes were on double shifts. Wartime emergencies had halted construction of schools. In 1947, the snowball of citizen effort to provide school facilities gained full momentum. The drive toward improvement of the schools started and has kept moving forward to make and maintain a first-class school system.

With a school enrollment which doubled over a ten-year period, the community has been able to improve, remodel, and enlarge all its old school buildings; build 19 new buildings; expand and improve the curriculum. Every year the Arlington schools are visited by educators from foreign countries, as well as from other parts of the United States. They come to observe the buildings, the curriculum, and the special services that are provided in the Arlington school system. They come because they have heard how the people of Arlington, not very many years ago, took dramatic steps to improve their schools and of the success they achieved.

The school staff of about a thousand comes from colleges and universities in all parts of the country. Almost all of them have either a bachelor's or master's degree. Their average salary is about $4500.

The three high schools in Arlington - Washington-Lee, Hoffman-Boston, and Wakefield - are now fully accredited, and a large proportion of their graduates are going on to colleges in Virginia and in many other states.